



# Department of Justice

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## **Former Public Officials Sentenced for Participating in Bribery and Extortion Conspiracy**

WASHINGTON – Three additional defendants were sentenced in federal court this week for their roles in a widespread bribery and extortion conspiracy which operated from January 2002 through March 2004, Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division announced today.

The charges arise from Operation Lively Green, an undercover investigation conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) that began in December 2001. The three defendants sentenced this week in U.S. District Court for the District of Arizona, Tucson Division, by the Honorable Cynthia K. Jorgenson were:

\*Angel Saul Hernandez, 33, a former sergeant in the U.S. Army, who was sentenced to 28 months in prison and fined \$8,000;

\*Steven L. Lawler, 27, a former sergeant with the U.S. Army, who was sentenced to 15 months in prison and fined \$3,000; and

\*Rene A. Salas, 32, a former private with the Arizona Army National Guard, who was sentenced to 12 months and one day in prison and fined \$3,000.

The defendants had each pleaded guilty to one count of conspiring to enrich themselves by obtaining cash bribes from persons they believed to be narcotics traffickers, but who were in fact FBI special agents. In return, the defendants were to use their official positions to assist, protect, and participate in the activities of an illegal narcotics trafficking organization engaged in transporting and distributing cocaine from Arizona to other locations in the southwestern United States. In order to protect the shipments of cocaine, the defendants wore official uniforms and carried official forms of identification, used official vehicles, and used their color of authority where necessary to prevent police stops, searches, and seizures of the narcotics as they drove the cocaine shipments on highways that passed through checkpoints manned by the U.S. Border Patrol, the Arizona Department of Public Safety, and Nevada law enforcement officers.

To date, 35 defendants have been sentenced in connection with the Lively Green investigation.

These cases are part of a joint investigation being conducted by the Southern Arizona Corruption Task Force (SACTF), which is comprised of the FBI, the Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at the Department of Homeland Security, and the Tucson Police Department. Though not part of the SACTF, the Arizona Air National Guard, Air Force Office of Special Investigations, Defense Criminal Investigative Service, and the Criminal Investigation Division of the Internal Revenue Service are also participating in the investigation. The cases are being prosecuted by Senior Trial

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Attorney Andrew G. Levchuk and Trial Attorney Michael Ferrara of the U.S. Department of Justice, Criminal Division, Public Integrity Section, headed by Chief William M. Welch II. The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Oklahoma has also secured the guilty pleas of seven defendants in a related investigation, Operation Tarnished Star.

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